

Riverside: A City Anchored by Downtown

By Mayor Ron Loveridge

Downtown is the front door the city shows the rest of the world. An attractive downtown is the commercial and cultural hub not only of our city -- it is a major hub for the entire region.

The revitalization and rebirth of Downtown Riverside achieves several objectives under my Three Directions for economic development, quality of life and inclusiveness.

Our city center has been described as a “concentration of unique, eclectic architecture and distinguished cultural institutions... unsurpassed in the Inland Empire,” by the Riverside Downtown Partnership.

Celebrating its centennial this fall is the Mission Inn, a prominent and influential downtown landmark that formed the cornerstone of our spectacular yet pedestrian-friendly downtown. Other key buildings downtown include the Riverside Convention Center, Riverside County administration buildings and the various courthouses of the Justice Center.

The International Downtown Association says “healthy, dynamic centers anchor the well-being of cities. Downtowns are how visitors judge places. When downtowns succeed, metropolitan areas also experience job growth and economic gain.”

Downtown Riverside is on the move.

Our city center is enjoying an extraordinary resurgence of interest by innovative and enthusiastic developers planning or building new projects that are changing the face of downtown.

A variety of stakeholders took part in a series of meetings in 2002 to help define both short and long term development goals. The resulting priorities helped shape economic development strategies in the midst of exciting new developments downtown.

So, just what’s new downtown?

One sign of the new face of Downtown Riverside is the newly completed Mission Village Homes project at First and Market streets, built by developer Mark Rubin. This exciting 46-unit housing project is the first new detached single family homes built in downtown in decades.

Infill housing of all types will be built in the coming years along Market Street between Fairmont Street and Fourteenth Avenue.

Marketplace, an almost 10-year project revitalizing the old railroad depot and warehouse district just east of the 91 freeway at downtown, is just about complete. The 1991 Marketplace Specific Plan helped inspire the new Downtown Metrolink Station, the construction of four new restaurants and the restoration of four historic buildings.

The Villagio project is a 300,000-square-foot retail-residential development being promoted by the Alan Mruvka Co. of Beverly Hills for the two-block area bounded by Market Street, Mission Inn Avenue, Fifth Street and Main Street, currently occupied by parking lots. Developers envision a two- and four-story structure that will incorporate existing business buildings along Main Street and otherwise blend with the historic surroundings. Villagio will include major and minor retailers, restaurants, a theatre and up to 100 residential units in a development valued in the \$60-70 million range.

Construction on this landmark project should begin by late 2004 and be completed within two years.

Another new development is Imperial Hardware, a \$35 million multi-story 133,000-square-foot office building being planned for the corner of University Avenue and Main Street by Riverside-based TG Properties and designed by Gensler & Associates of Santa Monica.

The mixed-use La Valencianna project is proposed for the block bounded by University Avenue, Lemon Street, Mission Inn Avenue and Lime Street. The proposal includes 41,560 square feet of ground-level commercial space and 66 condominium housing units and parking.

The 120,000-square-foot Crossroads Office Building development will inject new life into the Fairmount Park area, with a pair of three-story office structures at the intersection of Market Street and Highway 60, Developer Stewart Group LLC plans construction on the \$11 million project in early 2004. The City is investing \$2.7 million in streetscape improvements between Fairmount Street and the 60 freeway.

These are some of the major projects currently under way or on the drawing boards; more new developments are being discussed. Every new fixture in Downtown Riverside brings new people and new life to our City and shapes a modern, invigorated downtown where people want to work, shop, live and play.